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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet summarizes a conference in Boston on May 6, 1986. Its goal was to assess and plan strategies for the dropout problem in the Boston Public Schools. The Boston Compact, the draft plan contained in this document and prepared before the conference, served as the focus for discussion. Educators and administrators from across the country formed work groups to offer suggestions and recommendations for the plan. Some speakers and their topics were the following: (1) welcome addresss, William S. Edgerly; (2) "The Challenge of High-Risk Youth to Boston and the Nation," Julian T. Houston; and (3) "A Dropout Prevention and Reentry Proposal," Laval S. Wilson. The Draft Dropout Plan contained the following elements: (1) a statement of goals to reduce the dropout rate and return dropouts to educational programs; (2) background assumptions that explain the relationship between educational services and the decision to drop out; (3) structural issues recommending changes in the way educational and social services are organized; (4) program innovations for basic education; (5) plans for alternative educational programs; (6) plans for community services related to education; and (7) funding strategies. Recommendations from the work group concentrated on the scope and missing elements of the plan. (VM)

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# BOSTON DROPOUTS:

## PLANNING A COMMUNITY RESPONSE

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This pamphlet is a summary of a conference that took place on May 6, 1986 at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston to consider the dropout problem in the Boston Public Schools. It has been prepared by the Bank's Community Affairs Department as a public service. Those who attended included groups representing the School Department, businesses, universities, state and local government, and the community. A draft dropout plan, prepared by the Boston Compact Dropout Prevention and Reentry Task Force, was distributed to all who attended. The draft plan served as the focus of the conference discussion and its full text has been included here, along with summaries of the talks and the recommendations of conference work groups that discussed the plan.

Published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, August 1986

*CONTENTS*

*PART I PRESENTING THE DRAFT PLAN*

Introduction

Key Elements of the Boston Compact 1982-1986
Welcome:
William S. Edgerly, Chairman, State Street Bank and Trust Company and Founding Chairman, Boston Private Industry Council

Boston Public School Dropout Statistics 1982-1985

Keynote Address: The Challenge of High-Risk Youth to Boston and the Nation
The Honorable Julian T. Houston, Justice of the Roxbury District Court, Boston

A Dropout Prevention and Reentry Proposal
Laval S. Wilson, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools

The Draft Dropout Plan, developed by the Boston Compact Dropout Prevention and Reentry Task Force

*PART II RESPONSE TO THE PLAN*

Educational Leaders

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University of Wisconsin

Work Group Comments and Recommendations

High School Improvement
Middle School Improvement
Community Agency and Social Service Support for Dropouts
Alternative Education

Response: Superintendent Laval S. Wilson

*BOSTON DROPOUTS: PLANNING A COMMUNITY RESPONSE*

*INTRODUCTION*

Since September of 1982, the Boston Public Schools and city leaders from local government, business, labor, higher education, and the community have been engaged in a collaborative effort through the Boston Compact to improve the education available to Boston's young people. Under the Compact each partner is accountable for measurable goals: improved student attendance and a reduction in the number of dropouts; basic reading and math standards for all graduates by 1986; increased student success in finding jobs; apprenticeship training opportunities; and places in higher education.

Since 1982, Boston Public School attendance has improved significantly, as have reading and math scores; a competency-based graduation requirement in reading is being implemented this year. Boston's school-to-work transition effort, jointly run by the school system and the Boston Private Industry Council, has filled 2,500 summer jobs this year and placed 823 graduates last year in full-time jobs in the private sector. Colleges and universities have created a network of support organizations to increase college attendance. Area building trade unions are committed to increasing by 5 percent each year the percentage of graduates entering union apprenticeship programs.

However, the goal of reducing dropouts has not been met. In the school year 1985-86, over 3,000 high school students dropped out. Between their freshman year and graduation, 43 percent of the class of 1985 dropped out of school.

On May 6, 1986, the groups that make up the Compact joined in a one-day conference, "Boston Dropouts: Planning a Community Response." The conference was sponsored by the Committee for Economic Development, a national organization of private business leaders, and by the Boston Compact, the Boston Private Industry Council, State Street Bank and Trust Company, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. The Boston Conference is one of a series that the Committee for Economic Development is sponsoring across the country to encourage discussion of the issues in public education and public-private collaboration raised in their recent report, *Investing in Our Children*.

The conference provided a forum for the sustained discussion of a draft dropout prevention and reentry plan presented by School Superintendent Laval S. Wilson. The draft dropout plan was developed by a Boston Compact Steering Committee task force representing many different groups. It is a first step toward the development of a five-year strategy for reducing the number of school dropouts.

This report is a summary of the conference. Part I contains excerpts from the introductory remarks by William S. Edgerly, a review of the problem by Judge Julian T. Houston, and a presentation of the Draft Dropout Prevention and Reentry Plan by Superintendent Laval S. Wilson, given at the morning session, followed by the draft dropout plan given to all participants at the conference. Part II includes summaries of the remarks by four educational leaders concerning the draft plan and the comments and recommendations from each of four conference work groups: High School Improvement; Middle School Improvement; Community Agency and Social Service Support for Dropouts; and Alternative Education In and Out of School.

*KEY ELEMENTS OF THE BOSTON COMPACT*
*1982-1986*

*Boston Compact 1982 Goals:*

A 5 percent increase per year in the proportion of ninth graders who complete high school.

By 1986, a requirement that all graduates meet minimum competency standards in reading and math established by the School Committee.

A 5 percent increase per year in the number of graduates who are placed in jobs or in further education.

*Boston Compact Achievements 1982-86:*

Schools - An increase in the student attendance rate of 6.5 percentage points (from 78.4 to 84.9 percent) and higher test scores in reading and math by all races at all grade levels.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Business - | Summer jobs: | 852 in 1982; 2,320 in 1985 |
| | Part-time jobs: | 274 in 1982-83; 1,046 in 1984-85 |
| | Jobs for graduates: | 415 full-time jobs, class of 1983 |
| | | 823 full-time jobs, class of 1985 |

*Further Collaborative Agreements, 1982-86:*

In 1983, twenty-five colleges and universities pledged a 25 percent increase by 1989 in the proportion of Boston high school graduates going on to further education. They are operating a network of student assistance efforts.

Beginning in June 1985, Boston area building trade unions have pledged to increase by 5 percent per year the share of graduates accepted into joint apprenticeship programs.

*Other Related Programs*

Boston Human Services Collaborative, a consortium of social service and health agencies, has been organized to work more closely with schools.

The Boston Plan for Excellence, an endowment fund for Boston public schools that has attracted $4 million in contributions from major corporations, will fund programs for elementary, middle and high schools.

Access, a tuition aid program, provides financial aid and counseling to academically qualified students whose families cannot provide full tuition.

A major effort has been undertaken to equip schools with computer and support systems, including training for staff in their best use, with at least half the cost donated by private companies.

*WELCOME: William A. Edgerly*
*Chairman, State Street Bank and Trust Company and*
*Founding Chairman, Boston Private Industry Council*

The Boston Compact was founded four years ago as an effort to assure young people and their teachers that hard work in the Boston public schools would pay off in jobs and in opportunities for further education.

The Compact goals were clear – to increase attendance, to reduce the number of dropouts, to improve student academic performance so that all who graduate are competent in basic skills, and to increase access to jobs and further education . . . .

The results on nearly all of these measures are encouraging. Clearly, for its graduates, the Boston public schools are working. But far too many of our young people fail to graduate. Each year we lose 3,000 young people from our high schools as dropouts . . . .

The business community recognizes that the future of Boston's youth and, therefore, of the city itself depends on making marked progress in confronting this challenge. The school system alone cannot be expected to handle the dropout problem. This is not just one problem easily unraveled, it's a nest of problems. It is going to require collaboration of an even broader group of people and organizations across the community than our joint efforts through the Boston Compact. All concerned – business, public schools, community organizations, and parents – have roles to play if we are to achieve a breakthrough.

The Compact has shown the value of setting challenging goals. But on one of the goals – reducing the dropout rate – we have fallen far short of achievement. We could decide that this goal was simply impossible to begin with. But the right conclusion is that we simply underestimated how hard it would be to accomplish this goal. And now our task is to find a solution.

I'd like to thank the Committee for Economic Development – not only for its help in co-sponsoring this conference, but also for its very excellent report, *Investing in Our Children*. The report focuses squarely on the hard fact that dealing with failure in school requires more than simply raising standards. Real potential for progress lies in cooperation between the business community and the public schools.

## HOW MANY DROP OUT?

One comprehensive method of measuring the high school dropout rate follows a class from the time the students enter the 9th grade through graduation plus a 13th year (to include those not promoted at some point during high school), and calculates the dropout rate based on the activities of that particular class. Table 1 shows for each of four classes between 1982 and 1985 the percentages of students who dropped out, those who transferred from the Boston Public Schools to another school system, and those who completed their Boston Public School studies through graduation, summer school, or a 13th academic year.

Table 1
A Cohort Analysis of Boston High School Dropouts and Transfers
1982-1985

| COHORT (13th) YEAR | DROPOUTS | TRANSFERS OUT | NORMAL PROGRESS WITHIN BPS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1985: | 2640<br>43.0% | 716<br>11.7% | 2595<br>42.3% |
| 1984: | 2436<br>40.7% | 738<br>12.3% | 2563<br>42.8% |
| 1983: | 2354<br>38.0% | 831<br>13.4% | 2638<br>42.6% |
| 1982: | 2318<br>36.2% | 867<br>13.5% | 2785<br>43.5% |

*Source:* *Boston Public Schools, Office of Research & Development, A Working Document on the Dropout Problem in Boston Public Schools, May 1986, Exhibit 11, p. 49.*

## WHO DROPS OUT?

Table 2 compares the high school enrollment and dropout percentages by race and by gender for the school year 1984-85. The data show that black, white and Asian students are dropping out approximately in proportion to their enrollment or below, while Hispanic dropouts are disproportionately high. Similarly, the percentage of male dropouts is considerably higher than the percentage of male students.

Table 2
Enrollment and Dropout Percentage by Race and by Gender
School Year 1984-85

| | Percent of ENROLLMENT | Percent of DROPOUTS |
|---|---|---|
| Black | 47.7 | 48.0 |
| White | 29.2 | 28.2 |
| Asian | 7.9 | 4.7 |
| Hispanic | 13.7 | 17.9 |
| Other | 1.5 | 1.2 |
| All male students | 52.6 | 58.7 |
| All female students | 47.4 | 41.3 |

*Source:* *Boston Public Schools, Office of Research & Development, A Working Document on the Dropout Problem in Boston Public Schools, May 1986, Exhibit 13, p. 57 and Exhibit 15, p. 61.*

*KEYNOTE ADDRESS: The Challenge of High-Risk Youth to Boston and the Nation — The Honorable Julian T. Houston, Justice of the Roxbury District Court*

The subject that we have come here today to discuss is a serious one. Most of us would have to admit that 10 years ago, or even five years ago, it was inconceivable that a group such as this, composed of leaders of all colors from across the city, would sit down together in good faith to talk about the problem of dropouts in the Boston public schools. For more years than most of us care to remember, the public schools of this city were treated as the unwanted stepchild of its major institutions, snickered at by the academic community, ignored for the most part by the business community, and alternately scapegoated and plundered by the politicians. And it was not until the federal court concluded that it was necessary to take over the school system root and branch, in order to bring it into compliance with the Constitution, that most people in this city began to realize how terribly neglected the schools had become. Teachers weren't teaching, students weren't learning, and few students — white or black — were able to find employment in the workplace or go on to college. And to add insult to injury, large numbers of students were not going to school at all, and dropping out at an alarming rate.

Let me be specific. Since 1980, the number of dropouts in the Boston public schools has been steadily increasing, from roughly 2,000 for the school year 1980-81 to over 3,000 for the school year 1984-85. Looking at it another way, if these trends continue, more students will drop out of school each year than will graduate. . . . The trends are ominous. . . because the dropout is much more susceptible to falling victim to the countless pathologies that currently plague our society — drugs, crime, welfare dependency, unplanned pregnancy.

Clearly, this is a problem that other school systems around the country are facing, and in an earlier time, and with a different national mood, we might all look to the federal government for support and leadership in dealing with what is obviously becoming a national crisis. But this is 1986, and the size of the federal deficit precludes such thoughts. Any solutions that we are to devise for our dropout problem will have to be initiated by us. . . .

The members of the Boston Compact have chosen to recognize the seriousness of the dropout problem by establishing a task force on dropouts and sponsoring this conference today. These are important first steps. Similarly, Superintendent Wilson has cooperated with the Boston Compact in the development of the Dropout Prevention and Re-Entry Plan that is before you today, another important step. . . .

We also need, however, to develop a plan of attack. The draft dropout plan that has been distributed to you is a useful document to serve as a basis for discussion. As the outline demonstrates, there is no single solution to this problem, and we are going to need the support of state and local governments as well as community leaders like yourselves, if we are going to reverse this dangerous trend.

But let there be no mistake about where the ultimate responsibility for solving the dropout problem lies. The dropout problem, while certainly complex in its origin, must ultimately be solved in the schools. . . .

Obviously, there is much to be done. Still, we should not ignore the fact that we have already come a long way in a relatively short time. Six years ago, our schools were educationally and spiritually bankrupt. Today, with the leadership and support of the business community and the university community, and with the invaluable assistance of the Boston Compact and the Boston Plan for Excellence, our confidence in the capacity of our schools to educate our children is being restored. Ladies and gentlemen, the challenge of the dropout problem in the Boston public schools is now before you. I invite you to step forward to meet it.

*A DROPOUT PREVENTION AND REENTRY PROPOSAL*
*Laval S. Wilson, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools*

This community has already won substantial national attention and praise for the Boston Compact. The job and higher education opportunities now available for graduates are unmatched anywhere else in the country. The idea of the Compact is that young people need a tangible incentive to stay in school and work hard.

We have now learned, however, that the promise of a job, by itself, will not solve the dropout problem. Young people leave school for many different reasons — family pressures, parenting responsibilities, repeated academic failure, conflicts with teachers or other students. We need strategies that are comprehensive enough to respond to a wide variety of causal factors if we are going to make progress on solving this problem.

The draft dropout plan before you was put together for this conference by a broad-based task force. The plan is in my judgment a comprehensive one. Members of the task force were drawn from the schools, from city government, from the Boston Private Industry Council, from our business and university partners, and from community-based organizations.

The draft dropout plan, as proposed by the task force, begins with a very ambitious set of goals: that we commit ourselves over the next several years to reduce by one-half the number of students who drop out, and that we double the number of dropouts who return to regular or alternative schools.

The background assumptions underlying the plan are then presented. First, the dropout problem must be addressed in the context of systemwide improvement efforts, and our goal must be to make our schools more effective for *all* young people. Second, this initiative will focus on students in grades 6 to 12, while parallel initiatives are developed under the Boston Education Plan that will deal with separate but related problems such as early childhood education, the need for improved guidance and counseling, and adolescent issues.

The draft dropout plan then addresses some structural changes that might be considered. Possibilities include:

A statement of expectations to parents.

Incentives: for example, tying a student's access to a work permit to school attendance.

Reassessment of school rules.

An evening high school for students whose child care or family responsibilities make it difficult to attend during the day.

Financial incentives and sanctions for schools that are especially effective or ineffective in holding onto their students.

Increased coordination of social services.

The next section of the plan details some of the changes that must take place in our basic education:

Expand programs that focus on the transition points, 6th grade and 9th grade. Summer programs in Boston for entering 6th graders and entering 9th graders have demonstrated significant academic gains in

the last few years and have provided extra counseling and support to marginal students. Each 6th and 9th grader should have an individual education plan. Further, we should organize grades 6 and 9 into learning clusters rather than subject classrooms, so that students entering new schools can get more individual attention and support.

Increase time spent and emphasis on reading and writing in middle school by expanding Project Promise, an after school basic skill tutoring program.

Develop teams of school and social agency professionals to screen and assist students with problems.

Expand staff development opportunities and develop a reward structure for career performance.

Expand the parent outreach efforts launched in two 9th grades in 1984 as part of the Compact Ventures program.

Develop high school career programs in such areas as health, financial services, and communications, that can provide young people with academically challenging programs to prepare them for professional careers, not just entry-level jobs, in our high-growth economy.

We must also build upon our current network of alternative schools and programs. Here, the plan calls for:

An expansion of within-school alternatives.

The addition of new systemwide alternatives, including a citywide program for some of our most seriously troubled adolescents.

Substantial expansion of the community-based alternatives that are currently supported by the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services. We need to work closely with the Mayor's Office and the community agencies that operate these programs to integrate their curriculum objectives and standards with those of the public schools.

Finally, the draft dropout plan emphasizes the importance of building much stronger links between human service agencies and the public schools. We need agency help with:

Counseling and parent outreach;
School-based health clinics;
Better community-based referral services for parents and students; and
Follow-up of graduates and dropouts.

The task force has proposed a very ambitious set of goals — that we commit ourselves over the next several years to cut our dropout rate in half and to double the number of dropouts who return to some form of educational program. If the schools alone were asked to meet these goals, I don't believe we could succeed. I believe, however, that the schools, working with parents, community organizations, businesses, colleges, and city government, *can* meet these goals. It will take commitment, hard work, and extra resources, but our prosperity as a community depends upon our solving this problem.

The document you have received has been labeled a "working outline" of

a comprehensive dropout plan, and that is what it is intended to be. I think it represents an excellent beginning, but its purpose is to stimulate discussion and constructive criticism from school and community leaders. My hope is that you will read it carefully, jot down your ideas and suggestions, and do your part to ensure that the draft that emerges from this conference has the benefit of your best thinking. It is critically important for the future of our community that the dropout problem be addressed, and the plan that emerges from this conference will be our best vehicle for enlisting the community-wide support and resources necessary to make progress on this complex and difficult problem.

## BOSTON COMPACT DROPOUT PREVENTION AND REENTRY TASK FORCE

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*THE DRAFT DROPOUT PLAN*
*Developed by the Boston Compact Dropout Prevention and Reentry Task Force*

*STATEMENT OF GOALS:*

There has been substantial progress in the public schools in the last few years. Students are attending more and achieving more. Genuine educational and employment opportunities are virtually guaranteed for the graduates of the system. A major remaining problem is the number of young people who drop out before graduation.

The leadership of Boston — the Mayor, the School Committee, the Superintendent, business executives, unions, university presidents, and community advocates — believe that *every* young person can and should be equipped with the skills necessary to be a productive citizen. We pledge to work together as a community to achieve this goal. While we recognize that the actual number of dropouts each year is a symptom of more complex social as well as educational issues, we intend to measure our progress by our ability over the next three years:

- to reduce by one-half the number of students who drop out annually (from about 3,000 to 1,500);
- to double the number of dropouts who return to regular or alternative education (from about 500 to 1,000 per year).

*BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS:*

1) Young people leave school for a variety of reasons. Dropping out has multiple causes; therefore, solving the problem requires multiple responses. The problem belongs to the whole community, not just the public schools.

2) The dropout problem must be addressed in the context of systemwide improvement efforts. Reducing the number of dropouts means making the schools more effective for all students at all levels.

3) Services will be provided for students in grades 6 to 12, including those at risk of dropping out and those who have already dropped out. Other efforts within the system, under the Boston Education Plan, will contribute as well to improving the chances of students succeeding in school. These include expansion of early childhood programs, extended day for elementary students, better materials and supplies, and many others.

4) The success of a broad partnership in achieving the goals of the Boston Compact encourages us to address the dropout problem. It is vital that we take some immediate steps to remedy the problem. However, it is also important to evaluate programs carefully and to expand our knowledge of how best to untangle the complex causes of dropping out.

5) Incremental changes in the schools will not be sufficient. It is not a matter of simply adding programs or resources. The school system, with the positive support of the community it serves, needs to examine some of the fundamental aspects of how educational services are delivered. Similarly, the city's leadership should sustain and expand its initiatives to reduce adult illiteracy and to offer new job opportunities to adult residents.

Each of the following sections of the draft plan sketches in broad strokes

areas where action is needed. The specific recommendations are intended to promote discussion and to define the scope of a new initiative.

*STRUCTURAL ISSUES:*

We could enhance learning by making changes in the way schools are organized and the way education and social services are regulated. Students and their families should know what to expect from their schools: the rewards for performance and the consequences of neglect. For example:

1) A statement of expectations. The leadership of the city might send a letter to the parents of all new middle school students. This letter would encourage them to support their child's education and it would describe the successes that current graduates of the system are experiencing in higher education and in the labor market. The letter might also extend the promise of the Boston Compact: to help every graduate obtain a decent job or enrollment in college and the financial assistance needed to attend.

2) Incentives. We should work to reduce incentives for dropping out. Work permits might be linked to continuing school attendance. When students apply for driver's licenses or their parents apply for a social service like AFDC, the school status of teenagers should be monitored.

3) Reassessment of rules. Rules for student assignment, for example, have an impact on staying in school. The inconsistent enforcement of rules on attendance or behavior also has consequences. The requirement that all students attend school must be enforced fairly and consistently for all students.

4) Evening high school. Several program ideas sketched in this draft plan involve realigning structures. One example would be to open a high school as a full-time evening alternative for teenagers who have child-care problems, take care of a chronically ill family member, or need to work to support their family.

5) Incentives for schools and teachers. New resources should be awarded competitively. The Boston Plan for Excellence approach might be enlisted to stimulate individual school innovation. Bonuses might be given in the following year for schools that reduce the number of dropouts. Annual in-person review of each school's performance by the Superintendent and top administrators is important. Such a review would cover all aspects of school activity, not just those connected with dropout prevention.

6) Coordination of social services. The schools can be a coordination point for social services now provided by a network of public and private agencies. Some gains can be made by better interaction among the relevant parties. For its own part, the school system should establish clear internal leadership on the dropout issue. This might be done in conjunction with the Superintendent's ongoing review of central staff functions.

*BASIC EDUCATION:*

All entering 6th and 9th graders should have an individual education plan developed by a school team and reviewed with the student and his or her parents. This should be a simple document listing key data, particular student needs, educational goals, and the responsibilities of all parties, including both

student and parents. The plan would become the blueprint for each subsequent year, assessed and revised annually. Teachers should not be faced each September with substantial numbers of new students about whom they know nothing.

The Boston education community has been a rich source of educational innovation. However, the best local practices often do not get replicated within the system. Sometimes these practices are structural in nature and have no net cost (such as "semesterizing" high school credits). Others have additional costs, and should not be automatically adopted without examining the overall resource allocation within each school.

The following are examples of program innovations that either are already underway in Boston or might be expanded now, with careful ongoing evaluation. They are school-wide programs, not targeted solely to high-risk students.

1) Transitions between key grades. Students are especially vulnerable to dropping out when they are going into 6th, 7th, and 9th grades. Summer programs combining remediation, orientation, parental outreach, and guidance have worked. Possible next steps: Expand the City-Community Schools post-5th grade remediation program; expand Project STEP, the summer remediation program for pre-9th graders. Both programs have demonstrated academic gains during the summer.

2) More time and emphasis on reading and writing. Middle schools need more and better materials and improved training for teachers to be more effective with academically deficient students. Extra time for motivated but deficient students can also be helpful and is now being tried at the Timilty School. Possible next step: Expand Project Promise to several more middle schools, beginning in September 1986.

3) Cluster organization. Teachers working as a team with a stable group of students has been an effective technique in both middle and high schools: more individual attention, more cross-referencing of instructional and social needs, quicker crisis intervention. Possible next step: Expand this model to all 6th and 9th grades.

4) Student support teams. Early screening of student problems through an interdisciplinary team has reduced outside referrals. The team can include specialists from cooperating social and community agencies. This model has been tested K–12. Possible next steps: Double the number of schools with Student Support Team Programs. Study the impact on special needs costs.

5) Staff development. Professional opportunities are either unavailable or underfunded. Teachers need retraining in some fields and they need a reward structure for career performance. Possible next steps: Introduce special 1986 summer training for all middle school directors of instruction and high school department heads. Explore career ladder, "master teacher" concept with Boston Teachers Union.

6) Parent outreach. Schools need to work with community groups to make regular, effective contact with all parents and, especially, with families of at-risk students. Outreach staff based in schools have reduced truancy, helped solve personal problems of students and reduced the number of dropouts. Possible next steps: Double the number of high schools in fall 1986 that have Compact Ventures, a program for 9th grades which combines outreach, remediation, clustering, and student incentives.

7) Stronger career options in high schools. Few district high schools have academically challenging programs that can equip students beginning in the 9th grade with the skills and aspirations to move into college programs and thence to professional careers in our growth economy. Possible next steps: Begin planning with the business/university community for career academies linked with post-secondary school and work, in such fields as finance, medicine, and communications.

*ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS:*

Many students in the middle schools and high schools will drop out unless special programs are developed to address their immediate needs. Some students are far behind academically; some have behavioral problems and are difficult to teach in regular classrooms; and some have adult responsibilities that conflict with ordinary school time. Alternative programs, within a school or as freestanding projects, have been shown to succeed with marginal, high-risk students.

In addition, there are at least 6,000 youth in Boston right now who are under 18 but have left school altogether. Public and private agencies have shown that alternative school programs can draw these young people back to learning, employment, and higher education.

Whether for students still enrolled or for youth who have dropped out, alternatives require collaboration among educators, the community, and employers. The following models represent types of programs that now exist, do work and can be expanded to address the problem right away. It is important to review these programs carefully to assess their continuing effectiveness and to make sure they do not serve as places for students nobody wants.

1) Within-school alternatives. Individual middle schools and high schools have developed effective schools-within-a-school for more troubled students. New Horizons at the King Middle School and the Fenway at English High School show how this can be done. Possible next step: Add new in-school alternatives by January 1987.

2) Systemwide alternatives. Not every school is equipped to have an internal alternative program. Many students need specialized programs, like Recap or Boston Prep, which can bring together a diverse group of students and faculty. Possible next steps: Double the number of middle school and high school seats in these system-operated alternatives; explore the idea of a citywide high school for seriously troubled 14- to 18-year olds, to be run jointly with social service agencies.

3) Community-based alternatives. A number of alternative programs for dropouts are currently run by community-based organizations. Over the last decade they have proven effective in models as diverse as EdCo's high school diploma program (Youth Alternative), the General Educational Development (GED) approach of City Roots, operated by the Boston Community Schools Department, and Jobs for Youth. For several years, the primary source of funding for these programs has been the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services and the Boston Private Industry Council, through the Job Training Partnership Act. About 500 young people are being placed this year at a cost of about $2,000 per slot. These programs have waiting lists and can be expanded. Possible next steps: Double the number of seats in community-based alternative programs from 500 to 1,000. Work closely with agencies and with the Mayor's Office to integrate curriculum objectives

and standards with those of the public schools. Each dropout reenrolled in these alternatives is potentially a reenrollment in the Boston Public Schools.

*HUMAN SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY*

The dropout problem is not a problem that has been created by the schools, nor can they solve it on their own. This draft dropout plan focuses mainly on those aspects of crisis that can be addressed within the context of the public schools. Parental and community groups must play an active role. We must also pay renewed attention to the ancillary social and human services vital to all educational reform. If a middle school child has poor health or nutrition, learning is hindered. If a high school student has an abusive parent or is involved in court, learning becomes secondary.

Human services can have an important effect on the dropout problem. In developing these, as with all other aspects of this initiative, the energies, skills, and commitment of the whole community must be tapped. Examples of such services include:

1) Better counseling and parental outreach. Middle schools have few guidance counselors, yet numerous state and private agencies have social workers and other professionals who might be stationed part or full-time within the middle schools. There are good examples of such collaboration on behalf of teenage parents at the English, Dorchester, and Burke High Schools.

2) School-based health clinics. Schools are excellent locations for comprehensive health services. Boston is rich in medical institutions and the city already sponsors a network of neighborhood health centers. These clinics might be tried in more middle and high schools. Mental health services might be included as well. This structure, in turn, could be the nucleus for other school-based support services provided by external agencies.

3) Better community-based referral services for parents and students. Many organizations now provide information and referral to troubled students and their families. These efforts should be systematized and expanded, perhaps in conjunction with Freedom House's successful dropout hotline. In addition the case management services of the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services can be used to connect dropouts with education, jobs, and training.

4) Follow-up of graduates and dropouts. A structure should be established jointly with the schools, the Boston Private Industry Council, community agencies, and colleges to track both high school graduates and dropouts over time. Some steps have already been taken to launch such a database for graduates. Follow-up will enable the community to learn more about what happens to young people who have experienced different services. It is also an opportunity to offer assistance to young adults and to reconnect them with needed services.

*FUNDING STRATEGY*

Achieving the goals suggested in this plan will cost money. There should be a careful budgeting process for all aspects of the final plan. The school system needs to reexamine the present allocation of its resources. It should not view every dropout program as requiring more money, nor should there be an as-

sumption that the pledges made by the community's leadership are blank checks for any group within or outside the school system.

A general approach to funding necessary additional costs might be as follows:

1) The absolute importance of obtaining support from the Governor and the state legislature should be recognized. Dropouts are a statewide concern and the consequences of dropping out are already felt throughout the state budget, from adult literacy programs to correctional facilities, from AFDC expenditures to uninsured health care costs.

2) Funds for basic education programs should come mostly from existing school department resources, including such current state discretionary grants as Chapter 636 and Chapter 188.

3) Funds for alternative programs and human services should be generated through a public/private, state/local collaborative. It should be possible to interest local and national foundations in Boston's plans for services in this category and for evaluation and follow-up. No other city has attempted such an ambitious dropout approach – nor has any other city had the success Boston has shown in recent years in its partnership efforts.

*CONCLUSION*

This series of proposals is *not* a completed plan, but an *invitation* to Boston's concerned citizens to join in tackling a persistent, serious problem that transcends traditional boundaries between the schools and their community. We focus on the schools not because they created the problem, but because the educators and students within the system provide the best opportunity we have to solve the problem.

## *PART II RESPONSE TO THE PLAN*

Following Dr. Wilson's presentation, four educational leaders responded to the draft dropout plan. Their remarks are summarized.

*Gary J. Natriello, Associate Professor of Sociology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University*

This proposal deserves praise for recognizing the seriousness of the problem, addressing it in terms of the general program of the school, and also involving help from businesses, universities and especially the community. I would, however, raise several cautions.

Reducing the number of dropouts by one-half over three years is a commendable goal, but once we set the goal, people will find ways to reach it that we might not anticipate or approve of. We need to hold the goal up to the school system as an aspiration, but perhaps not judge accomplishments quite so fast or harshly.

The draft dropout plan proposes a systemwide approach, but implementation is not addressed. How does the plan reach down to every teacher and student?

Dropouts are very much more like young adults than they are like adolescents. As we plan, we need to think of them as young adults, with many of the same kinds of problems and many of the same kinds of pressures on them.

States and cities are raising educational standards and changing programs. We have yet to fully understand the impact of these reforms on all students, particularly on at-risk students. It might be that even if this ambitious dropout plan is put into effect, it will be completely overwhelmed by negative effects from other changes in the curriculum. Some kind of systemwide monitoring and auditing process is needed, here in Boston and around the country, to give us a better understanding of the impact of the changes.

*Mary J. Stokes, Principal, Charles Eliot Junior High School, Cleveland, Ohio*

As a practitioner in middle school education, I have experienced most of the inadequacies of the traditional junior high school and its failure to meet the needs of early adolescents. Decisions about schools are most often made on the basis of buildings, budget and buses, rather than on the needs of young people.

Research has shown that the early adolescent child has some unique needs: diversity, opportunity for self-exploration and self-definition, meaningful participation in school and the community, positive interaction with peers and with adults, and competence and achievement. I'm glad to see that this draft dropout plan is being extended to meet the needs of the middle school child.

But let me caution you – there is no magic in programs. The magic is in the people. The magic behind the dramatic jump in reading comprehension scores in my Cleveland middle school in the last five years has to do with

people: for example, extensive staff development to improve the teaching of reading; summer reading camp for students, staffed by volunteers; and monthly parent-teacher interviews where reading objectives are reviewed.

The draft dropout plan has established a commitment to the development of academic excellence and social adaptability. This commitment must be fully understood and accepted by the community, student, the school system staff, and parents. Everyone must embrace the same expectations and priorities if your dreams and aspirations are to become reality.

*Rafael Valdivieso, Vice President for Program and Research, Hispanic Policy Development Project, Washington, D.C.*

I admire the fact that this community has the courage and the will to face a very difficult problem, one that will not be easily solved, and may never be solved.

But there are some cautions. One danger is that you will find a mysterious group of youth who do not seem to respond to the opportunity for a job at the end of the line. My fear is that eventually you will begin to see these youths as "they," and you will start to feel that maybe these students are beyond the influence of our institutions and of our schools.

I am also concerned about the importance given to alternative education as part of the solution. Alternative education does work, but my fear is that by putting it up front, we will not look at how we can change the mainstream of our schools, the relationship between students and other students, and the relationship between students and teachers.

The National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics found that schools that work well with communities have clearly stated goals that are widely shared by teachers, administrators, students, parents and community. In addition, the schools have created a culture of concern and caring. They hire minority staff, and they identify parental needs and concerns as well as the needs of students.

Throughout the country, and obviously in the Boston area, we cannot afford the luxury of having an underclass. Everybody has to be productive in our society. There is today a real will to do something. We have a window of opportunity here, particularly the community groups, and we need to move in and work together on the development and implementation of this draft dropout plan.

*Gary G. Wehlege, Associate Director, National Center for Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin*

I hope you folks in Boston realize that the educational eyes of the country are on you. Everyone out there is waiting for some good news, and I think here in Boston there is some good news, which is very heartening.

The draft dropout plan deals with what I call technical and organizational matters, all of which have merit, but the central question remains: how can we, after designing good plans, make sure that teachers and administrators implement those plans in a way that's effective with kids? The spirit of this conference is not just to hold kids in school, but to create quality pro-

grams that make a real difference in the lives of students. The draft dropout plan, so far, does not address that issue adequately.

In looking around the country at what works for high-risk youth, my basic conclusion is that good programs not only ought to be good for kids, they ought to be good for teachers. I did not notice much attention in the draft dropout plan to how we are going to make the programs interesting, exciting, and good for teachers.

What works for high-risk youth? Smaller programs seem to be better. They create face-to-face relationships that students need and have been missing. Smaller programs are manageable. Teachers can own these programs, feel empowered and less isolated. They work with each other, sharing problems and successes. There's a joint ownership and a lot of collegiality. In addition, teachers in successful schools believe that students deserve another chance. And without exception, in programs that work the kids say their teachers care about them.

When we think about what works, we have to think about effective programs for students, but the schools have to be good places for teachers as well. And if they are, Boston will get the commitment that will make a difference in the lives of those kids.

## *WORK GROUP COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

Conference participants spent part of the morning and the afternoon in one of four work groups, each of which considered the draft plan. At the end of the day each of the work groups reported back to the conference on its recommendations.

*High School Improvement:* Moderators: William A. Lawrence, Headmaster, Boston High School, and Juliette K. Johnson, Headmaster, Brighton High School, Boston

*General Comments*

The goal to cut the dropout rate in half in three years is too ambitious and probably unattainable in that short a time.

The draft dropout plan focuses primarily on dropout prevention, with too little focus on young people who have already dropped out of school.

The document should include the step-by-step activities required to implement programs successfully.

*Structural Issues*

A single organization of parents that can deal with all parent/school-related issues should replace the numerous parents' groups organized around single issues, such as bilingual education and special education.

Evaluations of administrators and teachers are necessary but should not be used to determine schools' annual budgets.

*Basic Education*

The draft dropout plan should emphasize grades 5 and 8, the years prior to transition, rather than grades 6 and 9. Each student should have an Individual Educational Plan that follows as the student moves from school to school.

Teacher training is needed in several areas: improving student-teacher interactions; increasing student critical thinking skills; and increasing teachers' understanding of the different learning styles of young people.

Money is needed for health and social services, starting with the Boston Human Services Collaborative proposal.

*Alternative Education*

A school for disruptive students is not a good idea unless a clear program for the students is designed.

*Information Needed*

More information is needed on: how current rules push young people out; pupil attendance and dropout patterns by school; the effect of the promotional policy on linguistic minorities; the number of remediation programs needed to serve young people at risk.

*Middle School Improvement*: Moderator: Mary Grassa O'Neill, Principal, Timilty Middle School, Boston.

*General Comments*

Parents and teachers have to be involved in making the dropout prevention policy.

*Basic Education*

The middle school curriculum needs restructuring with emphasis on teaching students how to learn.

Program, teaching, and administrative stability is needed to keep and train staff at the middle school level.

More teacher training is needed, particularly on the developmental stages of young adolescents.

Funding for the Boston Human Services Collaborative and its provision of health and social services should be strengthened and stabilized.

The community needs to know more about the needs of the middle school child and the school itself. Open houses to greet new middle school students and parents, and individual parent interviews to review a student's educational plan, would be helpful.

*Alternative Education*

More learning options are needed at the middle school level: (1) an alternative school within each district that emphasizes different learning styles and approaches; and (2) more programatic options with clustering, block scheduling, and team teaching.

The group believes that it is possible to have an alternative program within each district with current resources.

*Community Agency and Social Service Support for Dropouts*: Moderators: Shirley Carrington, Executive Director, Roxbury Multi-Service Center, and Maria Estela Carrion, Executive Director, Hispanic Office of Planning & Evaluation.

*General Comments*

The draft dropout plan should include the delivery of social services in all schools from K through 12. Human service activities need to be incorporated into existing school planning formats.

The draft dropout plan should define the alternative education programs provided by community-based organizations, the accreditation of alternative education programs, and the mechanism that links alternative education and the school system.

The draft dropout plan should include a component that spells out how schools, programs, and the system as a whole are going to be monitored and evaluated.

The draft dropout plan needs programs that support parents and help them play a more effective role in their children's learning. The group also mentioned resources and information on employment, training for adult literacy, and the need for a national family policy to address the national crisis of families living in poverty.

*Structural Issues* The schools should give community-based organizations a greater role in prevention and alternative education rather than waiting until students have dropped out to call them in.

The community would like the schools to be more open and welcoming of parents and agencies.

Resources should be distributed more equally among the schools, with a more systematic discussion about how the distribution is determined.

There is a need for a mechanism to facilitate communication and collaboration with community-based organizations.

Staff development efforts should be expanded and developed.

*Alternative Education* The group supports alternative programs but emphasized they are not a panacea. They do not take away from the importance of providing quality education and social services to all children in the system.

*Information Needed* There is a need for more sharing of information about the programs run by the Boston Public Schools and community-based organizations, about which programs work best, and how to build on these successes.

*Alternative Education:* Moderators: Jay Ostrower, Director, Center for Jobs, Education, and Career Training, Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), and David Rosen, Associate Director, Jobs for Youth.

*General Comments* A successful alternative education program, whether school-based or community-based, can be characterized as follows:

students — a small number of students treated in a holistic fashion as part of a community, without rigid distinctions of "school" and "home"

teachers — teachers who work together as a team, and who choose to be part of the program

parent involvement

program — individualized curriculum and teaching strategies; a strong, personal counseling approach; built-in incentives for student success.

*Structural Issues* Establish a system of alternatives with a central planning office that addresses issues such as:

Information to dropouts about educational options both in and out of school.

Improved referral system that allows for easier access to school-based and community-based educational alternatives.

Reorganization of alternative programs so students can enter at any time during the year.

*Community Schools* Double the number of places in community-based alternatives, but keep them small; expand resources, space, and the number

of teachers as well as the number of student places, and be careful that the system does not compete with the regular school system.

The group opposes setting up a citywide high school for troubled 14-to 18-year olds, because it would label the kids going there.

Set up a citywide program for accrediting out-of-school alternatives or create a new alternative diploma (a new "high school without walls").

*In-School Alternatives* Add new high school and middle school alternatives by January, 1987.

*RESPONSE: Superintendent Laval S. Wilson*

I am delighted to have heard the excellent responses to our draft dropout plan. The small groups clearly did get into the different issues that we tried to outline in the plan. We made no attempt to present a final document, but we wanted to stimulate thinking and gain ideas from the conference participants, and that we did.

The reports from the work groups have given us many proposals to consider. The question also comes forth – What happens now? One component of the Boston Education Plan is the At-Risk Students Initiative, which also involves the question of dropouts. We plan to take the information from this conference and fold it into the Education Plan. In addition, members of the Conference Planning Committee and of the Task Force that put the Boston dropout plan together will be invited to take part in the At-Risk Students Initiative.

I was delighted to hear that the work groups want to meet again. As we move forward, we will try to pull these groups together to get feedback concerning the development of our plans. Most importantly, a clear message has been sent that the Boston community desires to reduce the dropout numbers. Whether or not the goal is too great for us to accomplish in three years, we will have to decide as we move into the specific plans. It may take us five years, it may take us four years, maybe we won't get quite half of all dropouts back, but clearly over 3,000 dropouts is a number more than large enough for us to work on.

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